

Vote clears way for Riverbend Walmart

BY BRITTANY WALLMAN
Staff writer

A planned Walmart Supercenter got the green light from Broward County on Tuesday for a mega-development on Broward Boulevard west of Interstate 95.

County commissioners voted unanimously to change the land-use designation on the south side of Broward Boulevard, between Southwest 24th and 27th avenues, from residential to commercial. Gatlin Development Co. plans a \$100 million commercial complex on the 25-acre site, with the Walmart and 25 to 30 other stores.

But the county commissioner who represents that area said he won't be shopping there.

Commissioner Dale Holness said Wal-Mart Stores Inc. didn't make an effort to include area businesses in the store's development, though the developer of the project, Gatlin Development Co., did.

"I've decided that until Wal-Mart is willing to really make a better effort," Holness said, "I'm not shopping there, and I think the community around it ought to think about that also, and hopefully I can come back here at some other point in the future and say, 'You know what, they really actually came to the table and are willing to ensure that the opportunity for all people in this area is there.'"

William Wertz, director of communications for Wal-Mart in the east, stated to the Sun Sentinel in an email: "As a

prospective tenant of Riverbend Marketplace, Wal-Mart has been open and transparent in presenting our plans to the community dating back more than a year. Those proposed plans have been well-received by area residents, small business owners and numerous elected officials. Today's vote was one more step toward bringing affordable grocery options and hundreds of quality jobs to Fort Lauderdale beginning as early as 2015."

In other action, Broward County commissioners also:

- Approved a \$12.6 million purchase that is expected to modernize the county bus system's communications with passengers, among other things. The computer-aided dispatch/automatic-vehicle-locator system from Integrated Systems Research Corp. will allow passengers to get real-time information — via text message, signs and mobile app — on where the buses are. The project has been in the works for years.

- Approved a change to the rules governing the county's online tax lien auctions, in order to eliminate the competitive advantage bidders gained by entering under multiple names. The Sun Sentinel reported in May that large financial institutions were gaming Broward County's system, edging out smaller bidders. The new rules will not allow multiple bidders that share a common financial or economic interest.

- Increased cab fare by \$1 for

passengers at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

- Set hearings for Feb. 11 to incorporate "Complete Streets" guidelines into county street design and into the county's Comprehensive Plan. Complete Streets guidelines consider mass transit, pedestrians and bike riders rather than just personal automobiles.

- Agreed to temporarily lease space in a county facility at 624 NW 15th Way in Fort Lauderdale to Broward Sheriff's Office, so BSO can move employees out of a Lauderhill office where air quality is a concern. The employees work in BSO's Department of Community Programs.

- Accepted a \$9.3 million block grant from the state to help run the county bus system this year. The county will match it with \$9.3 million. A larger discussion about future transit funding is expected at the commission's annual goals session March 7.

- Settled for \$479,500 a workers compensation claim from a former county waste and recycling employee who was injured on the job. The employee's lawyer will get \$60,124 of the settlement.

- Changed the funding formula for the coming 2.7-mile light-rail loop in downtown Fort Lauderdale, known as The Wave. The change reflects that Fort Lauderdale will contribute \$20.6 million towards its construction with a loan backed by a special assessment of property owners approved by the city last July.

- Agreed to negotiate with SP Plus Corp. to replace USA Parking Associates for management and operations of all public parking at Port Everglades.

- Agreed to develop land northeast of the Miramar Town Center, at the intersection of Hiatus Road and Miramar Boulevard, into a park-and-ride facility for the popular I-95 Express commuter bus service between Miramar and downtown Miami. Cost: \$3 million.



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